



## Mel Brooks has given "To Be or Not to Be" some terrific touches

**M**any a movie fan shudders when the word "remake" is mentioned. In recent years, the TV and movie industry has been crowded with remakes of classics done with only minimum money and talent, despite the thousands of writers offering original screenplays in Hollywood.

"The Letter", "Dark Victory", "East of Eden", "From Here to Eternity", "The Diary of Anne Frank", "The Miracle Worker", and many others have been completely



Taking bows for "Sweet Georgia Brown" — in Polish!

Durning, who it seems can do no wrong in whatever part he is given, José Ferrer, the amorous villain of the piece, Tim Matheson, as the romantic fan, and many others.

From the time the picture opens with Brooks and Bancroft singing "Sweet Georgia Brown" in Polish to its belly laugh tag, it is packed with laughs that conceal a message for tolerance and understanding.

Mr Brooks is never afraid to flirt with bad taste in his comedy routines and yet keeps them so hilariously funny that they become comedy classics. Remember the baked beans sequence in "Blazing Saddles"; the "Springtime for Hitler" pro-

## No question about it ~ this remake is a winner

underwhelming when compared with the original.

However, in the miasma of mediocrity there is a ray of sunshine. "To Be or Not to Be" was a delightful comedy made in 1941 with Jack Benny and Carole Lombard. Directed by the past master of sophisticated comedy, Ernst Lubitsch, "To Be or Not to Be" detailed, with quicksilver wit and charm, the adventures of a famed and ham-ish actor and his troupe when the Nazis occupied Poland. Jack Benny played the role to perfection, Carole Lombard, one of the screen's most stylish comedien-nes, was superb as the elegant actress wife of the overbearing star and the picture was cast with wonderful character actors.

It seemed impossible it could be done again with anything like the style and wit of the original. Fortunately, it has been. In lesser care than that of Mel Brooks it may have come undone, but Mr Brooks does not try to recreate the original. He and his cast re-interpret what was a very funny screenplay with delightful new touches.

Partnered by his wife, Anne Bancroft, playing his on-screen wife, his portrayal of the egocentric, overact-



Mel Brooks and Anne Bancroft (centre), as Frederick and Anna Bronski, listen to the roar of war planes.

ing, second-rate star Frederick Bronski is a delight to watch and one that does not betray the Jack Benny original. Miss Bancroft as Anna Bronski, the glamorous actress whose life is filled with theatricality, matches him line for line, laugh for laugh.

The joy is in having one of the most talented writer-director-comedians in pictures (he produced but didn't direct this one) teamed with one of the screen's greatest dramatic actresses in a perfect partnership.

They are backed by a cast of marvelous characters: George Gaynes, whom we first noticed as the hammy star of the soap opera in "Tootsie", Charles

duction number in "The Producers"; and "The Spanish Inquisition Extravaganza" in "History of the World, Part 1"? All of them came within a fraction of being absolutely tasteless, as some of the Monty Python efforts have been recently, but instead they are the subject of constant recall by devoted Mel Brooks fans.

Who else had ever dared show tap dancing Nazis as he did in "The Producers"? Nuns becoming an Esther Williams swimming chorus in "History of the World"?

Wisely, he had made the choreographer of these sequences the director of "To Be or Not to Be". Alan Johnson handles the pace of the film with the deftness of a dancer. Mr Brooks, like Ernst Lubitsch, realizes there is nothing funny about war, occupation, persecution, but he sees the funny side of human beings caught in those situations: that humanity can always laugh through its tears and that humour is the weapon that oppression can never defeat.

"To Be or Not to Be" gives audiences the chance to have an old-fashioned belly laugh and we need that now just as much as they needed it in 1941. **W**